

## **Pertussis (aka, Whooping Cough)**

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# **Pertussis (aka, Whooping Cough)**

Pertussis is a very contagious bacterial infection of the respiratory tract. Usually it causes a persistent cough, which follows a normal cold. The cough occurs in explosive bursts ending with the typical high-pitched *Whoop!* and occasionally vomiting. Between bursts of coughing the child appears well. Coughing attacks may continue to occur for 10-12 weeks. Pertussis is frequently complicated by pneumonia and ear infections, particularly in infants. Death from pertussis is rare.

### **Who gets this disease?**

Pertussis occurs in all age groups. Untreated cases in older children and adults can spread pertussis to infants and young children in the home. It is important that all infants and young children be up to date with pertussis vaccination. The most serious disease and complications are seen in infants and very young children.

### **How is it spread?**

The bacterium is spread by direct contact with discharge from the nose or throat of an infected person, or by breathing in infected droplets in the air when an infected person coughs. The period of greatest risk of spread is during the early "cold" stage.

### **What are the symptoms?**

The disease begins with the cold like symptoms such as runny nose and eyes, and cough. The cough becomes more persistent. Within 2 weeks the cough occurs as bouts of uncontrollable cough often with a "whoop" sound. Vomiting often follows the cough. The "whoop" sound. Vomiting often follows the cough. The "whoop" sound may be absent in older children and adults.

### **What if a child is exposed to pertussis?**

If exposed to a case of pertussis, the following children should receive one dose of DTaP vaccine as soon as possible.

1. Children under 7-years-of-age who have not received the three doses primary series and one booster dose (total of four).
2. Children under 7-years-of-age who have not received a dose of DTaP within the last three years.

Your physician may wish to put your child and all household members on antibiotics.

**How can the spread of this disease be prevented?**

The National Immunization Practices Advisory Committee (ACIP) recommends immunizing children against pertussis - along with diphtheria and tetanus - beginning as early as six-weeks-of-age. Children should receive five doses of diphtheria-tetanus-acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine. The first three doses are given at two-four- and six-months-of-age. The fourth dose should be given at 15- to 18-months-of-age and the fifth dose at age 4- to 6-years.

**Reportable?**

Yes, Pertussis is reportable by New Hampshire law.